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Residents get emotional over pitches plan for travellers

- ❑ More than 200 people turn up to discuss proposals
- ❑ Council earmarks two sites in Hockley

By EMMA THOMAS
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EMOTIONS were running high at a public meeting to discuss travellers' sites in Hockley.

More than 200 people turned up to a meeting at Greensward Academy, to talk about Rochford District Council's plans for the sites.

The council has to provide 18 travellers pitches across the district. Two sites in Hockley - Plumberow Avenue and New Park Road - were put forward as being suitable.

Keith Hudson, councillor responsible for planning said: "The council removed two illegal sites last year, one in Plumberow Avenue and one in Trender Avenue.

"Common sense has to come into it somewhere. Travellers do a lot of travelling. If they choose to be in our area, they need to be in a location that is accessible to the main hub of the highways. I don't think you could say Hockley is in the main hub."

One Hockley resident said



■ Have your say - residents packed out the meeting at Greensward Academy

at the meeting: "The councillor made reference to Plumberow Avenue. It seems ridiculous to me the council spent time and money to get travellers off that site, and now it's being considered as a travellers' site. It seems to me it is a case of the right and left hand not knowing what they are doing.

"On one hand you talk about options, and on the other you say it has come down from above and it is mandatory."

The resident also asked what was meant by a "pitch".

Planning policy team leader, Sam Hollingsworth, replied one pitch meant two caravans.

He added: "It is normally one pitch per family.

"The Plumberow site was

formally submitted to us and asked to be considered. We can't simply ignore it because of the past history."

All representatives from the council urged members of the audience to write in with their comments and suggestions.

The deadline for feedback on the consultation is April 30.

For more information, to view options for both documents and to submit your comments, go to www.rochford.gov.uk

Paper copies of the documents are also available to view at Rochford Council Offices, Rayleigh Civic Suite, and in all libraries within the district. Alternatively, residents can contact planning policy on 01702 318191.

Staff update Facebook at home ...because it's banned at work

STAFF are having to update Southend Council's social networking websites from home - because they are banned from using it at work.

The situation was revealed at a council meeting this week, when an opposition councillor claimed it was causing problems for the council getting its message across to youngsters.

Southend has an official Facebook page and a Twitter account, which both update followers and members on the latest council news.

The council's young people's champion Ian Gilbert (Labour, Victoria) raised the issue at the children and learning scrutiny committee because he was concerned about how the council was communicating

with young people. He said: "I know officers still have a problem because they're barred from using social networking sites."

"The Twitter feed has to be updated by officers from home."

Paul Greenhalgh, the council's corporate director for children and learning, said: "We recognise that it's an issue. We are finding ways to work with it."